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Champion's Point of View



by MR. DANA GOWARD
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Intelligence has designated 15 vessels off the U.S. mid-Atlantic coast as being of "high interest." Several are known smugglers, one has a suspected member of a terrorist organization aboard, and six are from small companies and have recently made port calls in countries that sponsor terrorist organizations. The USCG sector commander with responsibility for this area monitors these vessels through her common operational picture. It is a picture that also includes hundreds of vessels engaged in legitimate commerce and other activities. When it appears that one of the high-interest vessels near shore has departed its expected pattern of behavior, a duty officer is automatically alerted, just as the monitoring system also concludes that the vessel is now closing in on a cruise ship several miles away. The Coast Guard directs the cruise ship to alter course, a Harbor Police vessel already in the area is asked to investigate, and a USCG boat with a full boarding party is launched. Using a combination of intelligence information and broad situational awareness, a disastrous incident is avoided.

Worldwide more than 5 billion tons of cargo a year transits the global maritime domain, adding \$4 trillion to the global economy. Healthy maritime trade is fundamental to the overall economic vitality of our nation and its partners. Unfortunately terrorists and other evil doers also use maritime transportation for their own purposes, including outright attacks. Increasing the transparency of maritime activities, or Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), requires both targeted intelligence and general situational awareness. It shines a light on what everyone is doing, and leads to decreased illegal activity and greater focus and effectiveness for scarce enforcement resources.

MDA informs decision makers and enables them to take action to, in the best case, prevent incidents. Failing that, it will help inform and coordinate incident response.

MDA supports and informs all of the nation's maritime safety, security, and stewardship interests. The systems and processes that create awareness are just as important for prevention of, and response to, vessel collisions and oil spills, as they are for law enforcement and counterterrorism missions.

This issue of *Proceedings* discusses some the U.S. Coast Guard's efforts to improve Maritime Domain Awareness, as well as the efforts of some of our partners. It is organized around what we have come to describe as the four steps to achieve awareness—**collection** of data, **fusion** (or correlation and organization) of the data, **analysis** of the data to create information, and **dissemination** of the information to decision makers who need it. I hope that our efforts to collect, fuse, analyze, and disseminate information to you in this issue will give you information that you need and can use as well.